

THE REALITY OF  
SPIRITUAL  
ALLEGIANCE

Imām Aḥmad Ridā Khān 

*translated by Yusuf Murray with a  
foreword by Shaykh Ismaeel de Silva*

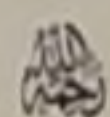
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TRANSLITERATION KEY

CONSONANTS

الإهداء

To  
the soul  
of the erudite  
scholar-sage  
of Bareilly,  
Imām  
Aḥmad Riḍā Khān  
Qādirī



# TRANSLITERATION KEY

## CONSONANTS

ا	'	ز	z	ق	q
ب	b	س	s	ك	k
ت	t	ش	sh	ل	l
ث	th	ص	ṣ	م	m
ج	j	ض	ḍ	ن	n
ح	ḥ	ط	ṭ	ه	h
خ	kh	ظ	ẓ	و	w
د	d	ع	'	ى	y
ذ	dh	غ	gh	ة	h / t
ر	r	ف	f	ال	al-

## VOWELS

Short			Long		
ا	a	إِ	إِ	ā	إِي
ي	i	أُ	أُ	ī	أُو
و	u	أَ	ā	آ	ū
Doubled			Diphthongs		
أَي	iyy	أُوو	أُوو	أَي	أَو
		أَوو	أَوو	أَي	أَو

“My master, the lofty scholar, Imām Aḥmad Riḍā رحمته:  
we recognise him by means of his written works and  
volumes. Love for him is a sign of the people of the  
Prophetic way [*sunnah*], whilst enmity for him is a sign  
of innovation [*bid'ah*].”

– Sayyid Muḥammad b. ‘Alawī Mālikī رحمته

## FOREWORD

by SHAYKH ISMAEEL DE SILVA

Today, questions of guidance and leadership are perhaps the two most pressing issues facing the Muslims of both the East and West. The question of in whom Muslims should place their trust and reliance following the departure of the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ from this mortal realm has been exploited by the founders of heresy to prey upon the innocence and simplicity of the common man throughout Islamic history.

The earliest manifestations of religious extremism came in the form of two groups in polar opposition to each other over whom they believed should lead and guide the Muslims. On one hand, the Kharijites believed that any righteous believer could lead the *ummah* and interpret the Qur'ān and Prophetic traditions [*sunnah*]. As a result, their interpretations became increasingly extreme: culminating in them declaring our masters 'Uthmān, 'Alī, Mu'āwiyah and many other companions ﷺ to have left the folds of Islam and fallen into disbelief.

At the other extreme, the Shi'ites denied the right to interpret the Qur'ān and Sunnah and to lead the Ummah to any but an infallible leader [*imām*] of the Prophetic household [*ahl al-bayt*]. The first of these leaders to their minds was our master 'Alī ﷺ. By the manipulation and fabrication of various texts, they forged a narrative of him being appointed to this role by the Prophet ﷺ and him transmitting this role to his sons. They came to believe this process was to continue until the

Day of Judgment, with an infallible leader existing for each and every age.

Despite occupying opposing ends of the spectrum in their conclusions regarding the issues of leadership and guidance, they shared a common rejection of the authoritative credentials of those who had directly lived and studied with the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ: the Companions [ṣaḥābah] ﷺ. Both of these groups then began to splinter into numerous sub-sects, many of which became extinct but a few of which persist as minority fringe groups to this day.

Between these two extremes lies the middle path, with the acceptance of the Companions' trustworthiness and religious authority as its hallmark, known as "the people of the Prophetic way and community [*ahl al-sunnat wa al-jamā'ah*]". Just as the *ahl al-sunnah* accepted the community of companions as their source of guidance, they also accepted each generation of scholars and sages that were educated and authorised by the preceding generation: providing a living community for the Muslims to refer to alongside the written legacy of the sages of old.

In the book currently before you, the great sage and revivalist [*mujaddid*] of the 14th *hijrī* century, Imām Aḥmad Riḍā Khān ﷺ reaffirms the soundness of relying upon this community of sages so to inoculate oneself from recent manifestations of the extremes discussed above which he observed among his contemporaries and which remain with us today. As he addressed those group who abandoned the consensus of the preceding generations of scholarship for their own direct interpretations of the texts -

such as his refutation of Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb of Najd contained in his works such as *Tahmīd-i Īmān*, *Al-Dawlat al-Makkiyyah* and *Al-Amn wa al-'Ulā* - here he tackles the extremes of certain claimants to Sufism in elevating their spiritual guides to the position of infallible leaders.

Whilst certainly not denying Sufism or the dependency of Sufi aspirants upon a spiritual guide, the Imām draws upon the texts of the Qur'ān, Prophetic traditions and writings of the sages and spiritual guides to place these institutions in their correct contexts by means of a considered and forensic approach. The Imām comprehensively demonstrates that salvation is dependent on following the guidance of the Prophet ﷺ whilst cautioning that accessing this guidance is not possible except through the community of sages through which it has been transmitted.

The Imām further affirms the reality of spiritual guides as a means of guiding aspirants to spiritual realities but makes clear that all claimants to such lofty status must be assessed in light of their knowledge of theology and jurisprudence: which in turn relies upon authentic transmission through the community of sages.

The translation of this book into English for the first time is therefore of vital importance to Muslims in the West considering pledging allegiance to a spiritual guide. Far too often, the institutions of Sufism and spiritual allegiance are tarnished by ignorant followers treating their spiritual guides as infallible: leading to much potential and tangible harm. Matters of both faith and law become entirely subjective to the views - or even perceived views - of the purported spiritual master. Curiously, just as with

the historical examples of the Kharijites and Shi'ites mentioned above, the Wahhābī and other non-conformist groups also form a set of two opposing extremes with pseudo-Sufi groups, sharing a common rejection of the need to verify their understanding of the Qur'ān and Prophetic traditions from the scholarly community.

I commend the erudite and versatile Yusuf Murray for his translation of this work and pray that he will continue to translate and publish the works of Imām Aḥmad Riḍā Khān ؒ and other luminaries of the *ahl al-sunnah* from the Indian subcontinent for the benefit of those of us who do not read Urdu. This book is indeed a jewel from a great mine of treasures: I hope it inspires you to purchase and read other books penned by the Imām if you haven't already, to learn for yourself his importance in the history of Islamic scholarship and his relevance to understanding the problems afflicting the Muslim *ummah* today and, crucially, their solutions.

ISMAEEL DE SILVA

London, United Kingdom

29 Ramaḍān 1438 AH / 24 June 2017 CE

## TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

Since I embraced Islam in 2005, it is fair to say that the noble scholar-sage of Bareilly, Imām Aḥmad Riḍā ؒ has been the most influential personality on my development and outlook. I have always considered myself spiritually and academically nourished by his corpus of written works and immense spiritual bounties.

Yet Imām Aḥmad Riḍā ؒ is, without a doubt, one of the most misunderstood figures of the modern world. From the putrid slander of those predisposed to cheap sectarian innuendo to the selective quotations of those who claim to respect him yet reduce his academic corpus to only that which furthers their agenda, rarely in history has a figure been so maligned and misrepresented.

These circumstances have long left me aware of the necessity of translating and publishing his works in their wider context so that the discerning and honest reader might begin to appreciate the depth of his scholarship and the nuance and insight to be found therein. Sadly, despite the presence of sub-continental scholars in the English-speaking world for almost four decades, no one with the notable exception of Shaykh 'Abd al-Hādī of South Africa has paid much attention to this essential task. Thus, despite my many inadequacies and shortcomings, I turned my attention to this task, seeking the mercy of Allāh ؒ and His Messenger ؐ and the assistance of their folk in this effort.

You now have before you the first fruit of this humble effort, a translation of one of his masterful treatments of a topic oft misunderstood in our age: that of pledging allegiance [*bay'ah*] to a

spiritual guide. The Urdu original was included in his collection of legal verdicts [*fatāwā*] issued in response to queries received from the Muslim communities residing in eastern and southern Africa, *Fatāwā Afrīqah*, and is available in both the complete work and as a separate publication entitled 'Ḥaḳīqat-i Bay'at'.

The concept of pledging allegiance to a guide is neither alien nor novel to the Islamic tradition. Indeed, the companions of the Messenger ﷺ attained Divine pleasure by means of this allegiance -

لَقَدْ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِذْ يُبَايِعُونَكَ

"Allāh was pleased with the believers when they pledged allegiance to you [O' Prophet]."<sup>1</sup>

This process continued into the era of the companions, and was maintained by those who followed them until today, with each generation dependent on the superior spiritual and intellectual stature of those who preceded them, as Shaykh 'Abd al-Wahhāb Sha'rānī ﷺ writes -

"If the people of an era transgress against the generation before them, their connection to the lawmaker ﷺ will be severed, and they shall attain no guidance. No difficulty will be rendered clear nor will any complicated matter be resolved. Reflect, my brother: if the Messenger ﷺ had not, in his sacred law, expounded upon that which was codified in the Qur'ān, then the Qur'ān would have remained unexplained. Similarly, if the *mujtahid* scholars

had not expounded upon that which was codified in the Prophetic tradition [*sunnah*], the tradition would have remained unexplained, and this (process) continues until our day and age."<sup>1</sup>

Imām Aḥmad Riḍā ﷺ himself comments upon this in another work, soon to be published by Kutubic, 'The Essence Of Purity: Rulings Pertaining To Spiritual Allegiance & Succession' -

"When this is the case regarding legal rulings, it is clear that to deduce the intricacies of spiritual wayfaring [*sulūk*] and the realities of gnosticism [*ma'rifah*] from the Qur'ān and Prophetic traditions [*ḥadīth*] without a true guide [*murshid kāmil*] is impossible [*muḥāl*]. This path is torturously thin and treacherously dark without the guiding light of a guide. The accursed Satan has attacked countless qualified folk upon this path and brought about their destruction. What is your reality that you can tread this path without a true guide and boast that you will emerge unharmed?"<sup>2</sup>

Yet as the erudite scholar of recent times, Shaykh Fayḍ Aḥmad 'Uwaysī ﷺ noted, we live in an era where "the notion of a *shaykh* accepting aspirants has not just become a mere custom, but also a means of amassing worldly wealth for many". Fraudulent claimants to the position of the weighty affair of spiritual allegiance and guidance have wreaked extensive damage on the community of

<sup>1</sup> Qur'ān: 48/18

<sup>1</sup> Al-Mizān al-Kubrā, P73

<sup>2</sup> Naqā' al-Salāfah fī Aḥkām al-Bay'at wa al-Khilāfat, P462



orthodox Muslims and provided ample ammunition to heterodox reformists and sectarianists, whilst the internet is replete with horrific accounts of physical abuse, emotional trauma and financial ruin suffered by naive followers at the hands of such charlatans.

In response, Imām Aḥmad Riḍā رحمہ اللہ علیہ lays out in this work an agenda that truly reflects the principle, "the best of affairs is moderation", bringing together citations from the Qur'an, Prophetic traditions [ḥadīth], statements of both the esoteric and exoteric sages of the Muslim nation and his own incisive reasoning and reflection to argue for a retention of the noble practice of pledging spiritual allegiance yet with clearly defined boundaries and criteria, whilst making clear that the common Muslim who does not pledge a specific allegiance to a *shaykh* is in no way worthy of reproach.

The Messenger ﷺ said, "the one who is not grateful to people is not grateful to Allāh", and thus I express my gratitude and thanks to the following individuals and pray that Allāh ﷻ rewards them with ample reward in both worlds. Mawlānā Najibullah Qadiri (Mumbai, India), Ḥāfiẓ Nisar Ahmad (New Jersey, USA), Mawlānā Raza Alam (Burton upon Trent, UK) and Ayesha Ayaz (Birmingham, UK) diligently proof-read and edited the work. Without their insight and expertise, this manuscript could never have reached publication.

Ḥāfiẓ Faizur Rahman (Dept. of Urdu, Jamia Millia Islamia University, New Delhi) - my companion and class-fellow of four years in the noble city of Bareilly - assisted with many of the more complex Urdu and Persian phrasings and constructs in this work,

whilst Shaykh Kavir Mohammed, Imām Ansar Francis and their families hosted me with much affection and generosity in Trinidad and Tobago during the final editing and typesetting of this work. The publication of this work was also made possible by the financial support of Sohaib Hussain (Peterborough, UK), Faysal Hussain (Slough, UK) and Moinuddin Chikhalia (London, UK).

I am also indebted to Shaykh Ismael de Silva for his words of erudition and insight in his foreword which he kindly penned at very short notice. I pray that Allāh ﷻ keep him and his family safe from all harm and adversity and grant them much goodness.

I could not conclude without paying tribute to two luminaries of our age: Shaykh Muḥammad Ilyās 'Aṭṭār Qādirī and Shaykh Mannān Riḍā Khān. It was by means of the former that I as a young convert in Europe came to know of an Indian scholar-sage from one-and-a-half centuries prior, whilst the latter hosted, supported and cherished me for half a decade when I was later blessed to reside and study at the final resting place of that scholar-sage, Imām Aḥmad Riḍā رحمہ اللہ علیہ.

کیسے آقاؤں کا بندہ ہوں رضا  
بول بالے میری سرکاروں کے

"Of what lofty masters am I the servant, Riḍā!  
Renowned is the rule of my sovereigns!"

YUSUF MURRAY

Port of Spain, Trinidad & Tobago

The day of Badr,

17 Ramaḍān 1438 AH / June 2017 CE

<sup>1</sup> Sunan Abī Dawūd: Book 43, Ḥadīth 4793

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Imām Aḥmad Riḍā ؒ was born to a pious and scholarly family of Afghan descent on 10 Shawwāl 1272 AH (c. June 1865 CE) in the former princely city of Bareilly, situated in the modern-day state of Uttar Pradesh in India.

Beginning his studies according to the tradition at the tender age of four, he was fluent in Arabic by the age of six and qualified as jurist [*muftī*] when he was just shy of fourteen years of age. He immediately turned his attention to teaching the seekers of sacred knowledge and penning legal verdicts and other papers on a wide range of interests encompassing religious, social and material sciences.

At the age of twenty-two, he travelled the modest distance from Bareilly to the luminous town of Marehra, the spiritual epicentre of the offspring of the Messenger ؐ in India, and pledged spiritual allegiance in the Qādirī path to Shāh Āl al-Rasūl Barakātī ؒ. The *shaykh* was cognisant of the piety and erudition of the young Imām Aḥmad Riḍā ؒ to the extent that he immediately bestowed his viceregency [*khilāfah*] upon him, saying, “others come here to undertake spiritual development, but Aḥmad Riḍā has come developed”.

He was particularly devoted to the blessed personage of the Messenger of Allah ؐ, his kinsfolk and companions ؓ, and was defined by the deep and intuitive loyalty he felt to Imām Abū Ḥanīfah ؒ and Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir Jīlānī ؒ. He afforded great honour and affection to the descendants of the Prophetic

household, sitting them closest to him whilst hosting guests, presenting them with gifts and refusing to allow them to serve him in any way.

He was a personification of the Prophetic characteristic of balancing mercy with principle, embodying vast compassion and concern for people's wellbeing whilst never compromising on the principles set forth by the religion. Indeed, when schismatics reared their ugly head in the Indian subcontinent during his lifetime, he wrote extensive refutations of their heterodox excesses, with foresight that has since been vindicated many times over by the geopolitical upheavals brought about as a result of this sectarianism.

He performed two pilgrimages to the twin sanctuaries, in 1295 AH (1878 CE) and 1323 AH (1905 CE) and was proclaimed the 'reviver' [*mujaddid*] of the fourteenth century by the scholars of the Indian subcontinent and the Arabian Peninsula in 1318 AH (1900 CE) and 1321 AH (1906 CE) respectively.

Whilst remaining aloof from the vicissitudes of electoral politics, he was deeply troubled by the tribulations that befell both the Muslims of the subcontinent and the decline of the Ottoman Empire, supplicating for their preservation and offering his insightful counsel throughout his latter years.

His written works include a five-volume Arabic commentary of 'Radd al-Muhtār' of Sayyid Ibn 'Ābidīn Shāmī رحمته الله, the first accurate translation of the Qur'ān in the Urdu language entitled 'Kanz al-Īmān' and a twelve-volume collection of legal verdicts entitled 'Al-'Atāyā al-Nabawiyah fi-l-Fatāwā al-Riḍawiyah'. In total, he

authored 679 works in his lifetime, writing an average of seventy pages a day throughout his adult life. Tragically, many of his works remain in manuscript form or have been lost to the passage of time.

He was also an accomplished poet, penning almost 150 compositions throughout his life in praise of the Divine Majesty, the Prophetic being and the luminaries of the Muslim nation. His collected poems in the Urdu, Persian, Arabic and Hindi languages are published in a collection entitled 'Ḥadā'iq-i Bakhshish'. Until today it is rare to find a religious gathering of Urdu-speaking Muslims anywhere in the globe except that a composition from his collection would be sung.

He continues to be the topic of much eulogistic and academic writing, with tens of biographies and PhD theses penned in English, Hindi and Urdu. In Arabic, the renowned Egyptian scholar Shaykh Khālid Thābit has authored a volume on his life and works entitled 'Inṣāf al-Imām'.

On 25 Ṣafar 1340 AH (c. October 1921 CE) he departed this temporal abode at the time of the Friday prayer as the caller to prayer cried out, "come to success."

YUSUF MURRAY

Bareilly, India

Ramaḍān 1436 AH / July 2015 CE

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

THE REALITY OF  
SPIRITUAL  
ALLEGIANCE

QUERY

Will the person who does not have a spiritual guide [*murshid*] attain salvation [*falāḥ*] or not? Will his guide be Satan in such a situation? For Allāh ﷻ orders -

وَابْتَغُوا إِلَيْهِ الْوَسِيلَةَ

“And seek a means to Him.”

ANSWER

It is true that both adages are found in the statements of the noble sages [*awliyā'*], and I will shortly establish them from the noble Qur'ān. Firstly, that the one without a guide will not attain salvation is mentioned by our master, Shaykh Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī ﷺ in 'Awārif al-Ma'ārif -

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1 Qur'ān: 5/35

"I have heard the majority of the masters [*mashā'ikh*] state that the one who did not observe someone who had obtained salvation shall not obtain salvation."

Secondly, that the guide of the guide-less is Satan – it is mentioned in 'Awārif al-Ma'ārif –

"It is narrated from Abū Yazīd (our Master Bāyazīd Bastāmī) ﷺ that he said, 'Whomsoever has no teacher [*ustādh*], his leader [*imām*] is Satan.'"

The majestic Imām, Abū al-Qāsim Qushayrī ﷺ mentions in his Risālah –

"It is binding upon the aspirant [*murīd*] that he submits to spiritual nurturing at the hands of a *shaykh*, for the one without a teacher shall never attain salvation. As Abū Yazīd states, 'Whomsoever has no teacher, his leader is Satan.'"

He continues –

"I heard my teacher Abū 'Alī al-Daqqāq say, 'If a tree grows itself, without a gardener, it will bear leaves but no fruit. Similarly, the aspirant: if he eschews a guide from whom he takes the path step-by-step, then he remains a slave to his own desires, and will not reach his goal.'"

Our Master, the scion of the Messenger ﷺ, Sayyid 'Abd al-Wāhid of Bilgram ﷺ writes (a verse of Persian poetry) in Sab' Sanābil –

چو پیرت نیست پیرتست ابلیس  
که راه دین زوست از مکر و تبلیس

"The guide-less one has the devil as his guide,  
for the path of religion becomes but mischief and deception."

This issue requires a wealth of depth and discussion, thus I state, and from Allāh ﷻ is enabling grace [*tawfiq*]: salvation is of two types.

Firstly: salvation in terms of eventual redemption. Even though this may be – Allāh forbid – post-punishment, it is guaranteed for each and every Muslim according to the doctrine of the *ahl al-sunnah*<sup>1</sup> and is not dependent upon pledging allegiance to any *shaykh*. To regard the Prophet ﷺ as one's guide is sufficient.

Indeed, during the outset of Islam, salvation was even established for those unenlightened individuals residing in far-flung, mountainous and uncharted regions where the news of Prophethood did not reach, provided they left this world as monotheists.

This is proven from the narration [*ḥadīth*] mentioned in the collections of Bukhārī and Muslim. It is narrated from our Master Anas (b. Mālik) ﷺ that the Messenger ﷺ said –

"People will come to me on the Day of Judgement having been turned away by other Prophets. I will say, 'I am for

<sup>1</sup> "People of mortal sins among the community of Muḥammad ﷺ will not abide in the Fire forever, as long as they died as monotheists." – The Creed of Imam al-Taḥāwī, P68

this (i.e. intercession). I will seek the permission of my Lord and it will be granted. I will prostrate before Him and it will be said to me, 'O Muḥammad! Raise your head. Speak - it would be heard. Ask - it will be granted. Intercede - your intercession shall be accepted.'

I shall say, 'My Lord: my nation, my nation'. It will be said, 'Go, and remove from hell anyone who has a barley seed's worth of faith [*īmān*] in their heart.' I shall go and remove them, and then return to the Divine presence and prostrate. It will be said to me, 'O Muḥammad! Raise your head. Speak - it would be heard. Ask - it will be granted. Intercede - your intercession shall be accepted.' I shall say, 'My Lord: my nation, my nation'. It will be said, 'Go, and remove from hell anyone who has a mustard seed's worth of faith [*īmān*] in their heart.'

I shall go and remove them, and then return to the Divine presence a third time and prostrate. It will be said to me, 'O Muḥammad! Raise your head. Speak - it would be heard. Ask - it will be granted. Intercede - your intercession shall be accepted.' I shall say, 'My Lord: my nation, my nation'. It will be said, 'Go, and remove from hell anyone who has even a portion of a mustard seed's worth of faith [*īmān*] in their heart.'

I shall go and remove them, and then return to the Divine presence a fourth time and prostrate. It will be said to me, 'O Muḥammad! Raise your head. Speak - it would be heard. Ask - it will be granted. Intercede -

your intercession shall be accepted.' I shall say, 'My Lord, permit me to also remove those who believed You to be One.' It shall be proclaimed, 'This is not for you, yet I swear by My Honour, Glory, Majesty and Might: I shall remove each and every monotheist from it.'"<sup>1</sup>

I state: this in no way invalidates the intercession of the Messenger ﷺ for them (monotheists), for it is only upon his request that they are removed from hell. Rather, the premise is that they received no opportunity to benefit from Prophethood and professed only faith as can be derived from one's intellect alone - i.e. monotheism [*tawḥīd*].

I further state: the meaning of this narration [*ḥadīth*] that I have set forth makes it clear that this narration in no manner contradicts the sound narration which states -

"I shall present myself before my Lord such that I shall stand and intercede for nothing save that it shall be accepted, such that my Lord will proclaim, 'Admit into Paradise all those from your nation and the creation who testified that 'there is no god but Allāh' and died upon this.'"<sup>2</sup>

As this refers to the (Muhammadan) nation [*ummah*] and thus "no god but Allah [*lā ilāha illa-Llāh*]" refers to the entire testimony of faith [*shahādah*]. Such is illustrated by the narration of Imām

<sup>1</sup> Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim: Book 1, Ḥadīth 377

<sup>2</sup> Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr: 17/79

Aḥmad and in Saḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān narrated by our master Abū Hurayrah ؓ that our noble master ؓ said -

“My intercession is for those who proclaimed ‘there is no god but Allāh’ sincerely and that ‘Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allāh’ with their tongue and heart in cohesion.”<sup>1</sup>

O’ Allāh be my witness, I suffice myself with You as a witness: I testify sincerely and exclusively with my tongue and heart that verily there is no god but Allāh, and that verily Muhammad ؓ is the Messenger of Allāh. I am not of the polytheists, all praise be for Allāh, the Lord of the worlds.

Secondly: immediate redemption, such that one enters Paradise without suffering any punishment, which has two facets. In the doctrine of the *ahl al-sunnah*, this is entirely dependent on Divine grace: if He wills, He may redeem someone though they are a major sinner, and if He wills, He may punish someone in lieu of a single minor sin [*ṣaghīrah*]: this being balanced between justice [*‘adl*] and grace [*faḍl*] -

يَغْفِرُ لِمَن يَشَاءُ وَيُعَذِّبُ مَن يَشَاءُ

“He forgives whom He wills and punishes whom He wills.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Fath al-Bari: Ḥadīth 9799

<sup>2</sup> Qur’ān: 3/130

Through the intercession of our noble master ؓ, innumerable major sinners will thus attain salvation, as he ؓ stated -

“My intercession is for those of my nation who have committed enormities [*al-kabā’ir*].”<sup>1</sup>

And he ؓ further stated -

“I was offered a choice between intercession (for whom I will) or half of my nation entering Paradise. I opted for intercession for it is the vastest and most sufficient. Do you assume it to be for the pious believers? No; rather it is for the sinners, the tainted, those who err. And all praise is for Allāh, Lord of the worlds.”<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, there will even be those whose sins are replaced with good deeds -

فَأُولَئِكَ يُبَدِّلُ اللَّهُ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ حَسَنَاتٍ

“For them, Allāh will replace their evil deeds with good.”<sup>3</sup>

It is mentioned in a narration that on the Day of Judgement, an individual will be brought forth and it will be said, “recall his minor sins but do not reveal his major sins”.

<sup>1</sup> Jāmi’ al-Tirmidhī: Vol. 4, Book 11, Ḥadīth 2435

<sup>2</sup> Sunan Ibn Mājah: Vol. 5, Book 37, Ḥadīth 4317

<sup>3</sup> Qur’ān: 25/70

He will be asked, "did you do this certain sin on a certain day?" He will reply in the affirmative, remaining fearful due to his major sins when it will then be proclaimed: "grant him a good deed in place of every bad one." He will exclaim "my Lord, I have many sins that haven't even been heard." The narrator continues, "after saying this, the Messenger ﷺ smiled so much that his molars became visible."<sup>1</sup>

Such salvation is predicated on nothing besides (accepting) Islam and the mercy of Allāh ﷻ and His Messenger ﷺ. One should mould their deeds, habits, words and state such that if they were to die upon them, then - by longing for Divine mercy - they would enter Paradise without suffering any torment. This is the salvation we have been ordered to seek -

سَابِقُوا إِلَىٰ مَغْفِرَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَجَنَّةٍ عَرْضُهَا كَعَرْضِ  
السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ

*"Race toward forgiveness from your Lord and a Garden whose width is like the width of the heaven and earth..."*<sup>2</sup>

Human salvation is of two types, the first being mere exoteric salvation. Be warned: this does not refer to that sought by mere ritualistic folk. Such individuals concentrate solely on the deeds of the limbs and exoteric rulings, saving themselves from material sins and considering themselves to be pious and saved. Yet their

<sup>1</sup> Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim: Book 1, Ḥadīth 365

<sup>2</sup> Qur'ān: 57/21

esoteric state is tainted by deadly traits such as ostentation, vanity, envy, hatred, arrogance, narcissism, love of the world, attention-seeking, belittling the poor, being a slave to desires and flattery, ingratitude, greed, miserliness, avidity, impudence, aversion to the truth, stubbornness upon falsehood and deceit, treachery, untrustworthiness, negligence, cruelty, avarice, adulation, dependence upon the creation, forgetfulness of the Creator, heedlessness of death, arrogance against Allāh, hypocrisy, obedience to Satan, egocentricity, indolence, laziness, scarcity of fear (of the Divine), absence of God-consciousness, anger and being negligent of Allāh.

Like pitching an embroidered marquee over a cesspit, the exterior is beautified whilst the interior is filth. Would such inward impurity permit any outward reform to survive? Be warned: when the situation demands, there is nothing (such folk) will not say and no limit they will not pass.

How many of the lay folk will number amongst the upright and pious? For even countless scholars [‘ulamā] are of this type, though they appear pious [muttaqī] - except those Allāh wills, and how few are they! I would have said this more explicitly, but to what end? The truth is indeed bitter - and difficult it is indeed to take benefit thereof and begin to rectify one's self. Most instead respond with enmity.

Yet, I will say this: many are those heretics and apostates who insult Allāh ﷻ and His Messenger ﷺ under the guise of academia in their writings and publications whilst such (scholars) sit by idly. Perhaps due to lack of concern or the influence of secular society,



perhaps due to corruption and greed or fear of having to face these individuals. Perhaps they fear that by refuting such individuals and warning the Muslims of their disbelief, their opponents will pursue them, expose them to ridicule in the media and slander them? Thus they remain silent, none amongst them willing to sacrifice their comforts (to refute) such impure ideologies.

Yet if one draws their attention to an error in their own actions or indeed creed, they abandon all pretence of civility, inaction, indifference and peaceful conduct. In such a situation, they disregard all limits and defend themselves in any way possible, taking enmity to its extremes.

When they find themselves unable to respond to the truth, they will resort to hostility and arrogance - to the extent of fabricating quotations and references - adopting any means to ensure that their status and fame amongst people are not affected and their income from public speaking does not diminish. Is this God-consciousness [*taqwā*]?

Indeed not! Their indifference to those who speak ill of Allāh ﷻ and His Messenger ﷺ and their passionate defences of their own selves demonstrate that they hold the status of their own egos above the status of Allāh ﷻ and His Messenger ﷺ in their hearts. What can be said to this, other than "to Allāh we belong and to Him we shall return" and "there is no power nor strength save with Allāh - the Lofty, the Magnificent!"

In summary, such a state bears no resemblance to salvation but rather is clear destruction. Rather, exoteric salvation is to

diligently implement those Divine commands pertaining to both the limbs and heart in their entirety: such that an individual never engages in any major sin [*kabīrah*] nor do they persist in minor sins [*ṣaghīrah*].

If one is unable to eradicate these blameworthy traits, they should seek to limit them, such that they do not fall into the trap of becoming obedient to them. For example, if an individual's heart is miserly, they should suppress their ego and adopt generosity. Similarly, if an individual is envious, they should never wish ill for the one they envy and so on. For this is the greatest struggle [*jihād akbar*], after which there is no punishment, but only ample reward.

It is mentioned in a narration [*ḥadīth*] that our noble master ﷺ said -

"There are three (negative traits) this nation [*ummah*] is unable to safeguard themselves from: envy, ill thoughts and superstition. Shall I inform you of the way to escape them? When you suspect (an individual), do not act upon (your suspicions), when you envy someone, do not harm them, and when you are superstitious, continue."<sup>1</sup>

This is the salvation of God-consciousness [*ḥalāḥ al-taqwā*], by means of which an individual becomes truly pious [*muttaqī*]. We have labelled this 'exoteric salvation' in as much as that all it requires in implementation and abstinence has been made clear and detailed -

<sup>1</sup> Al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaghīr: Ḥadīth 3450

قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرَّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ

“True guidance has become distinct from error.”

As for esoteric salvation, it is to empty the heart and character of all vices and embellish them with virtuous traits, removing obscure polytheism [*shirk khafī*] from the heart such that it manifests “no objective save Allāh [*lā maqṣūda illa-Llāh*]”, “none witnessed save Allāh [*lā mashhūda illa-Llāh*]” and “none existent save Allāh [*lā mawjūda illa-Llāh*]”.

Meaning - to begin, one should seek to remove all other (than Allāh) from their intention. Then, one should seek to remove all other (than Allāh) from their sight. Finally, reality manifests itself: that ‘existence’ is only for Him and all else is merely fleeting. This is the height of salvation, the salvation of excellence [*falāḥ al-iḥsān*].

The salvation of God-consciousness [*falāḥ al-taqwā*] distances an individual from the Fire and delivers them to the serenity of Paradise -

فَمَنْ رُحِزَ عَنِ النَّارِ وَأُدْخِلَ الْجَنَّةَ فَقَدْ فَازَ

“So whoever is kept away from the Fire and admitted into Paradise has succeeded.”<sup>2</sup>

1 Qur’ān: 2/256

2 Qur’ān: 3/185

The salvation of excellence [*falāḥ al-iḥsān*] is greater than this, for never mind punishment, there is not even any danger of fear or grief:

أَلَا إِنَّ أَوْلِيَاءَ اللَّهِ لَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

“Beware: verily upon the friends of Allāh there is no fear, nor do they grieve.”

In any case, all salvation is predicated upon needing a guide [*murshid*], which can be one of two types -

#### 1 - GENERAL GUIDE [MURSHID ‘ĀM]

This is the teachings of Allāh ﷻ, His Messenger ﷺ, the leaders [*a’immah*] of the sacred law [*sharī’ah*] and spiritual paths [*ṭarīqah*], the scholars of the religion [*‘ulamā al-dīn*] and the folk of insight and guidance.

This is in accordance with the established principle that the guide of the lay folk is the speech of the scholars [*‘ulamā*], the guide of the scholars is the speech of the leaders, the guide of the leaders is the speech of the Messenger ﷺ and the guiding principle of the Messenger ﷺ is the speech of Allāh.

It is apparent that no salvation - whether it be exoteric or esoteric - exists without this guide [*murshid*]. The one who rejects this (guide) undoubtedly falls into disbelief or misguidance and such an individual’s worship is rendered null and void.

1 Qur’ān: 10/62

## 2 - SPECIFIC GUIDE [MURSHID KHĀṢ]

When an individual pledges spiritual allegiance to a scholar [‘ālim] of correct creed and actions [ṣaḥīḥ al-‘aqīdah wa-l-a‘māl] who fulfils the conditions [jāmi‘ al-sharā’iṭ] of accepting such a pledge [bay‘ah], this is a specific guide [murshid khāṣ] – also known as a pīr or shaykh. These are also of two types –

## 2.1 - SHAYKH OF TRANSMISSION [SHAYKH AL-ITTIṢĀL]

A shaykh of transmission is such an individual who accepts pledges of spiritual allegiance [bay‘ah] that connect an individual by chains of transmission [silsilah] to our illuminated master, the Messenger ﷺ. For such (a shaykh) to be valid, there are four conditions –

1. His chain of transmission [silsilah] must reach soundly and continually to our noble Prophet ﷺ without any severance in between, for transmission [ittiṣāl] is not possible through a severed medium.

Some individuals sit in the place of their forefathers – without having pledged spiritual allegiance [bay‘ah] themselves, or perhaps having pledged spiritual allegiance but having failed to receive vicegerency [khilāfah] – and accept pledges of spiritual allegiance without any authority besides mere pretence and lineage.

In other cases, the chain of transmission [silsilah] itself may be severed, leaving it void of spiritual blessings [fayḍ], but survives by means of individuals who continue

to issue endorsements and vicegerencies therein merely for the fulfilment of their desires. Or the chain of transmission itself may have been initially sound but a specific branch became severed due to an individual therein who was ineligible to accept pledges of allegiance due to the absence of some of the prerequisites in him. In all of these cases, such a pledge of allegiance will not result in transmission [ittiṣāl]: much the same as one will not obtain milk from a bull or a calf from a neutered cow.

2. He must be a Sunni possessing the correct creed [ṣaḥīḥ al-‘aqīdah]. The chain of transmission [silsilah] of heretical individuals leads to Satan and not to the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ. Be warned, for nowadays many brazen heretics and apostates – even including the Wahhābī sect, who from their outset have been sworn enemies of the saints [awliyā’] – seek to fool people by laying traps disguised as the system of spiritual wayfaring.

اے با ابلیس آدم روئے ہست  
پس بہرہو سے بنا ید او دست

“Satan oft comes in a human form,  
so give not your hand to each and every man.”

3. He must be a scholar [‘ālim]. I state: it suffices (the condition of) knowledge [‘ilm] that he be capable of all that is necessary of him. It is imperative that he be aware of the doctrines [‘aqā’id] of the ahl al-sunnah in their entirety and that he be able to clearly distinguish between Islam

and disbelief [*kufr*], guidance and misguidance. For if not, then whilst he may not fall into misguidance today, he definitely will tomorrow - "for whomsoever does not recognise evil will one day fall into it."

There are countless statements and deeds that bring about disbelief which the uneducated fall into as a result of their ignorance. At the very least, they remain unaware that such a statement or deed brings about disbelief, and repentance is impossible without awareness. If their attention was brought (to this disbelief), a good-natured if uneducated individual should become fearful and repent. But if they are acting the role of a guide [*murshid*] by virtue of their ancestry, and their heart is convinced of their own grandeur, when will their hearts permit them to submit?

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُ اتَّقِ اللَّهَ أَخَذَتْهُ الْعِزَّةُ بِالْإِثْمِ

"And when it is said to him, 'fear Allāh', pride leads him to sin."<sup>1</sup>

Even if they incline to the truth and concede, what are the odds of them repenting from this statement or deed of disbelief when it renders their own pledge of allegiance [*bay'ah*] void? Now to whom will they pledge allegiance and distribute an updated spiritual lineage [*shajarah*] bearing the new *shaykh*'s name when they are known as

<sup>1</sup> Qur'ān: 2/206

a vicegerent [*khalīfah*] of their initial *shaykh*? They will never be content to accept this with its implications of changing their chain of transmission [*silsilah*] and abandoning the gathering of gullible people as followers. Thus, for (a *shaykh*) to be a scholar [*‘ālim*] aware of (the correct) doctrines [*‘aqā'id*] is imperative.

4. He must not be an open transgressor [*fāsiq mu‘lin*]. I state: the obtainment of transmission [*ittiṣāl*] is not predicated upon this condition, for mere transgression [*fiṣq*] does not necessitate annulment. However, as it is necessary to both respect one's *shaykh* and express disdain for transgression, the combination of the two is a fallacy.

These realities were made manifest by Imam Zayla‘ī and others (who said), "Following their leadership (implies) reverence of (such transgressors), when it has been made binding [*wājib*] to express disdain for them."

## 2.2 - SHAYKH OF DELIVERANCE [SHAYKH AL-ĪṢĀL]

A *shaykh* who, along with fulfilling all of the above conditions, is well aware of the ailments of the lower-self, the ruses of Satan and the snares of desire, able to spiritually nurture others, benevolent to his aspirants: alerting them to their shortcomings and demonstrating their cures, solving the difficulties that arise in their spiritual progress.

He should neither be a mere wayfarer [*sālik*] nor one incapacitated by spiritual intoxication [*majdhūb*]: it is written in 'Awārif (al-

Ma'ārif) that both are incapable of being guides. I state: this is firstly due to the fact that both are still traversing the path themselves, and secondly that they are heedless of the methods of spiritual nurturing. Indeed, if the wayfarer is himself incapacitated or vice versa, it is even more so. I state: this is due to (a *shaykh*) being the aspired [*murād*], whilst (such a wayfarer) is himself still an aspirant [*murīd*].

Pledges of spiritual allegiance [*bay'ah*] are also of two types -

#### 1 - PLEDGE OF BLESSINGS [BAY'AT AL-BARAKAH]

This is when an individual enters the chain of transmission [*silsilah*] only seeking blessings [*tabarruk*]. Most common pledges of allegiance in this day and age are of this type - provided they are rooted in pious intentions, unlike the multitudes who pledge allegiance in pursuit of baseless worldly intents, for they are excluded from this discussion.

Such a pledge [*bay'ah*] is predicated only on the *shaykh* of transmission [*shaykh al-ittiṣāl*] fulfilling the four abovementioned conditions. I state: even this is not futile. Rather, it is of benefit - indeed great benefit in this world and the hereafter - for an individual's name to be inscribed in the registers of the bondsmen of the beloveds of God, and to connect oneself to them through a chain of transmission is in itself an honour.

Firstly, (such a pledge) is an imitation of the elect servants who traverse the spiritual path, and the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said,

"Whoever imitates a people is from them."<sup>1</sup> The grand-*shaykh*, Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī ﷺ states in 'Awārif al-Ma'ārif -

"Know that spiritual mantles [*khirqah*] are of two types: the mantle of aspiration [*khirqat al-irādah*] and the mantle of seeking blessings [*khirqat al-tabarruk*]. That which the masters [*mashā'ikh*] originally sought from their aspirants was the mantle of aspiration, whilst the mantle of seeking blessings is a mere imitation of the mantle of aspiration.

Thus, whilst the true aspirant [*al-murīd al-ḥaqīqī*] is (adorned with) the mantle of aspiration and the mantle of seeking blessings is just imitation thereof, 'whoever imitates a people is from them.'"

Secondly, one adopts a trait of the elite servants, for "proximity to the rose suffices the nightingale." It is not just the Messenger ﷺ but rather his Lord ﷻ who states -

"They are (such) a people that those who sit amongst them are not ill-fortuned."<sup>2</sup>

Thirdly, it is a sign of mercy that the beloveds of God accept those who invoke their names and gaze generously upon them. The inimitable *imām*, our master Abū al-Ḥasan ﷺ mentions in Bahjat al-Asrār that our master, al-Ghawth al-A'zam (Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir Jīlānī) ﷺ was asked whether an individual who invoked

<sup>1</sup> Sunan Abī Dawūd: Book 33, Ḥadīth 4020

<sup>2</sup> Majma' al-Zawā'id: Ḥadīth 16769

the *shaykh*'s name but never pledged allegiance at his hand nor adopted his mantle would be considered as his aspirant [*murid*]. (The Shaykh replied -)

“Whoever ascribes and attributes themselves to me, Allāh ﷻ will accept them and cause them to repent if they are upon a disliked path. They will be amongst the ranks of my companions, and verily my Lord has promised me that my companions, the folk of my school [*ahl madhhabī*] and my lovers in their entirety will enter Paradise [*jannah*].”

## 2 - PLEDGE OF ASPIRATION [BAY‘AT AL-IRĀDAH]

This is when an individual totally abandons their personal aspirations and free-will and submits themselves entirely at the hand of a *shaykh* who acts as a truthful guide and source of reality. They must accept him as their total sovereign and keeper, and tread the path of spiritual wayfaring [*irādah*] according to his instructions, refraining from taking a single step without his approval. For this, they must liken any of his instructions, attributes or actions that are seemingly ungainly to the actions of our master Khidr ؑ and blame a defect in their own understanding, refraining from critiquing him even in their own heart or mind. They must present all their difficulties to him, such that they resemble a corpse in the hands of the living.

This is the pledge of the wayfarers: it is this that is sought by the guiding masters [*mashā'ikh murshidūn*] and it is this that delivers an individual to Allāh ﷻ. It is this pledge that our noble master

accepted from his companions, as described by our master 'Ubādah b. Ṣāmit Anṣārī ؓ -

“We pledged allegiance to the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ to hear and obey in ease and hardship, joy and sorrow, and not to contest the command of those in authority.”<sup>1</sup>

The command of a true guide is the command of the Messenger ﷺ and the command of the Messenger ﷺ is the command of Allāh ﷻ. The command of Allāh ﷻ is not to be rejected at whim, as He ﷻ states -

وَمَا كَانَ لِمُؤْمِنٍ وَلَا مُؤْمِنَةٍ إِذَا قَضَى اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ أَمْرًا أَنْ يَكُونَ لَهُمُ الْخِيَرَةُ مِنْ أَمْرِهِمْ<sup>2</sup> وَمَنْ يَعْصِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلَالًا مُّبِينًا

“It is not befitting a believing man or woman, when Allāh and His Messenger have decreed on a matter that concerns them, to have any choice in the matter: whoever disobeys Allāh and His Messenger is clearly astray.”<sup>2</sup>

It is written in 'Awārif (al-Ma'ārif) -

“An individual entering the instruction of a *shaykh* is them entering the instruction of Allāh ﷻ and His

<sup>1</sup> Mishkāt al-Maṣābiḥ: Ḥadīth 3666

<sup>2</sup> Qur'ān: 33/36

Messenger ﷺ, and the pledging of allegiance is a revival of the Prophetic way [*iḥyā' al-sunnah*].”

It continues -

“This is only for the aspirant [*murīd*] who incarcerates their ego [*nafs*] in the care of the *shaykh*, sheds the desires of their ego and becomes obliterated in the *shaykh* by abandoning the free-will of their lower self.”

It further states -

“Beware of criticising the *shaykh*, for it is a lethal poison for the aspirants. Slim are the chances of an aspirant criticising the *shaykh* and then attaining salvation. Whenever something troubles the aspirant from amongst the actions of the *shaykh*, he should remember the story of our master Khidr ؑ, and how many of his actions were rejected by our master Mūsā ؑ. Yet when he revealed their deeper meaning, it became apparent that he had acted correctly. In the same manner, it is imperative for the aspirant that he know that whichever of the utterances or deeds of the *shaykh* he takes issue with, the *shaykh* possesses proof that they are sound.”

Imām Abū al-Qāsim Qushayrī ؑ writes in his *Risālah* -

“I heard our master Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Sulamī ؑ say that Shaykh Abū Sahl Ṣulūkī ؑ said, ‘Whoever objects to his teacher shall never attain salvation.’”

We ask Allāh ﷻ for clemency! Having discussed these categories, let us now consider the ruling of the initial query. Salvation in every form is intrinsically dependent upon a general guide [*murshid ‘ām*]. Both the salvation of God-consciousness [*falāḥ al-taqwā*] and of excellence [*falāḥ al-iḥsān*] are unobtainable whilst separate from this guide - even if one follows a specific guide [*murshid khāṣ*] or pretends to be one himself!

I state: separation (from the general guide) may be of two types. Firstly, separation by way of one’s deeds: for example, by committing a major sin [*kabīrah*] or persisting in committing minor sins [*ṣaghā’ir*].

Worse than this, however, are those ignoramuses who refuse to benefit from the scholars [*‘ulamā*], and worse again are those ignoramuses who formulate their own ignorant opinions and rulings in opposition to the rulings of the scholars and promote traditions that contradict the teachings of the scholars. Even if they are informed that their teachings are baseless in light of the Qur’ān and Prophetic traditions, they continue to insist them to be correct.

Whilst all these individuals have failed to assure their salvation, some are closer to destruction than others. For an individual merely failing to perform their religious obligations does not render them “without a guide” or cause “Satan to be their guide”, provided they remain faithful to the saints and scholars [*awliyā’ wa ‘ulamā*] from the depths of their heart despite occasionally falling to the transgressions of the lower self [*nafs*].

As there are two categories of allegiance [*bay'ah*] with respect to the guide [*murshid*], there are also two categories of allegiance with respect to the aspirant [*murīd*]. If the aspirant implements the instructions of the guide, their pledge is one of aspiration [*irādah*], and if not, it is still not void of blessings [*barakah*]. For if such an aspirant possesses faith and belief despite being a sinner, they are still amongst the ascribants: whether it be by means of a guide who fulfils the aforementioned four conditions or by means of the general guide [*murshid 'ām*]. However, such individuals remain deprived of (assured) salvation due to their transgressions.

Secondly, separation by way of rejection, such as,

1. Those satanic harlequins who mock the scholars of the religion [*'ulamā' al-dīn*] and state their rulings to be false. They include those deceptive claimants to asceticism who claim that scholars have always been subservient to the ascetics, to the extent that some feculent individuals who claim to be viceregents of the saints and even the "spiritual axes [*aqṭāb*] of the age" have been known to say, "What are the scholars? They are nothing more than priests! A true scholar should be able to perform miracles like the Prophets of the tribe of Israel [*banī isrā'īl*]."

2. Those two-faced heathens who falsely claim spirituality and sainthood and proclaim, "The sacred law [*sharī'ah*] was just a path. As we have reached our destination, what use have we with the path?" I have refuted these putrid notions in my work 'Maqāl al-'Urafā' Bi-'Izāz Shar' wa

'Ulamā' [Aphorisms Of The Gnostics: The Excellence Of Scholars & The Sacred Law]<sup>1</sup>.

Imām Abū al-Qāsim Qushayrī ؒ mentions in his blessed 'Risālah', "Abū 'Alī al-Baghdādī, who resided in Egypt and passed away there in 322/223 AH, remained in the company of Junayd (al-Baghdādī) ؒ and (Abū al-Ḥusayn Aḥmad) al-Nūrī ؒ who were such guides that few have greater insight into spirituality than them. When he was asked about an individual who listened to instruments, claiming that it was permissible for him as he had reached a rank whereby he was unaffected by alterations in his state, he replied, "indeed, he has reached, but only to the Hellfire."

The gnostic, my master 'Abd al-Wahhāb Sha'rānī ؒ writes in 'Al-Yawāqīt wa al-Jawāhir fī 'Aqā'id al-Akābir [Gems and Jewels: The Doctrines Of The Authorities]' that our master Junayd al-Baghdādī ؒ was asked about people who claim, "rulings are merely a means to arrive (at spiritual loftiness), and we have already arrived." He ؒ replied, "They speak the truth. They have already arrived, but to the Hellfire. Alcoholics and adulterers are better than those who hold such beliefs."

3. Those misguiding ignoramuses who, in spite of being uneducated or only having read a few random books, masquerade as scholars. They speak independently of the scholars, supposing that they understand the Qur'ān and

<sup>1</sup> The original Urdu work can be found in V2I of Fatāwā Riḍāwiyyah.



Prophetic narrations [*aḥādīth*] as Imām Abū Ḥanīfah ؒ and Imām Shāfi'ī ؒ did, or perhaps even more than they did, accusing them of issuing verdicts that contradict the Qur'an and Prophetic narrations and correcting their mistakes! These rejecters of following qualified scholarship [*ghayr muqallidūn*] are truly irreligious.

4. Worse than the aforementioned are those who espouse the core issues of Wahhabism, emptying their minds of all but 'Taqwiyat al-Īmān'<sup>1</sup>, even to the extent of discarding the Qur'an and Prophetic narrations in favour of what it contains. It goes as far as to imply that even Allāh ؑ and His Messenger ؐ are polytheistic - Allāh forbid! Such individuals seemingly reject Allāh ؑ and His Messenger ؐ and proclaim faith in this book instead.

5. Worse again are those Deobandis who tolerate insults to Allāh ؑ and His Messenger ؐ in a futile attempt to portray the heresy of Gangohi, Thanwi and Nanthwi as Islam.

6-12. Followers of Qadiyanism, naturalism, Quranism, Rafidism, Kharijism, Nawasibism, Mu'tazilism and so on.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Written in the Urdu language by Ismā'īl Dihlawī, the work was the first time the agenda of Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb (of Najd) contained in his 'Kitāb al-Tawḥīd' was presented in the Indian subcontinent. It unjustly proclaims the vast majority of the Muslims to be polytheists and apostates and permits their killing amongst many other heretical and divisive beliefs.

<sup>2</sup> These groups are discussed in 'Hudūth al-Fitan [The Emergence of Tribulation]' of Shaykh Muḥammad Aḥmad Misbāḥī, soon to be published by Kutubic.

All of these groups are either disbelieving or misguided, obstinate rejecters of the general guide [*murshid 'ām*] and in grave loss. Their guide is truly Satan, even if they claim to have pledged allegiance to another or that they are a guide, saint [*walī*] or spiritual axis [*quṭb*] themselves. Allāh ؑ states -

اسْتَحْوَذَ عَلَيْهِمُ الشَّيْطَانُ فَأَنسَاهُمْ ذِكْرَ اللَّهِ أُولَئِكَ حِزْبُ الشَّيْطَانِ أَلَا إِنَّ حِزْبَ الشَّيْطَانِ هُمُ الْخَاسِرُونَ

"Satan has overcome them and made them forget the remembrance of Allāh. They are the party of Satan. Beware: the party of Satan alone is in loss."<sup>1</sup>

We seek refuge with Allāh ؑ, Lord of the worlds! I state: the salvation of God-consciousness [*falāḥ al-taqwā*] is not dependent on a guide to the extent that an individual is categorically unable to attain salvation without one. As I have already stated, the rulings pertaining to exoteric salvation are apparent, such that a person can attain piety by means of his own knowledge or reference to the scholars. Whilst there are a finite number of intricacies with regards to the affairs of the heart, they are documented in the works of the scholars such as Imām Abū Ṭālib Makkī ؒ and the proof of Islam, Imām Ghazālī ؒ such that even without a specific [*khāṣ*] pledge of allegiance, the path remains wide and the door open.

For if we suffice ourselves with this, I have already stated that even an impious Sunni is not without a guide, so how can a pious Sunni be guide-less, or - Allāh forbid - a disciple of Satan? Even though

<sup>1</sup> Qur'an: 58/19

they may not have pledged an oath at the hands of a specific guide, the path they are traversing is not predicated on any guidance beyond that of the general guide, and thus such an individual is already in possession of that which they required from a guide.

Therefore the second statement of the sages, "whoever does not have a guide, his guide is Satan," cannot refer to such an individual. As for the first statement, "one without a guide cannot attain salvation," this too is inapplicable in such a case, for the salvation of God-consciousness [*falāḥ al-taqwā*] is without doubt salvation, even if the salvation of excellence [*falāḥ al-iḥsān*] be greater and more majestic. Allāh ﷻ states -

إِن تَجْتَنِبُوا كَبَائِرَ مَا تُنْهَوْنَ عَنْهُ نُكَفِّرْ عَنْكُمْ  
سَيِّئَاتِكُمْ وَنُدْخِلْكُمْ مُدْخَلًا كَرِيمًا

*"If you avoid the major sins which you are forbidden,  
We will remove from you your minor sins and admit  
you to a place of nobility."*

Allāh ﷻ has proclaimed that He is with both the people of God-consciousness and excellence -

إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ مُحْسِنُونَ

*"Verily, Allāh is with those who are conscious of  
Him and those who embody excellence."*

1 Qur'ān: 4/31

2 Qur'ān: 16/128

As for what is necessary for salvation, I state: generally, God-consciousness is individually obligatory [*farḍ 'ayn*] on each and every Muslim, and according to the truthful Divine promise this suffices for salvation from punishment [*'adhāb*] in the hereafter.

In comparison, whilst excellence - the highest station of spiritual wayfaring on the path to sainthood - may be desirable and beloved, it is not obligatory [*farḍ*] in the same way. For if this were the case, millions of Muslims other than the saints (who only number approximately one-hundred and twenty-four thousand at any given time), including thousands of scholars and upright Muslims would be guilty of failing to fulfil an obligation and therefore sinful.

Even the saints never sought to invite one-and-all to this path, rather selecting a few out of the masses to traverse it and rejecting those who they found to be incapable of the journey. How could they have turned people away from that which was obligatory?

لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا

*"Allāh does not burden any soul beyond its ability."*

لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا مَا آتَاهَا

*"Allāh does not burden any soul beyond what he has  
given it."*

It is written in 'Awārif (al-Ma'ārif) -

1 Qur'ān: 2/286

2 Qur'ān: 65/7

“The mantle of seeking blessings [*khirqat al-tabarruk*] may be given to whoever seeks it whilst the mantle of aspiration [*khirqat al-irādah*] should only be given to those who are able. One should not seek the conditions of this way from those who are unable to fulfil them, but merely advise them to abide by the sacred law [*sharī‘ah*] and adopt the company of the saints. Perhaps by the blessings of this, they would become worthy of the mantle of aspiration.”

It is apparent that neglecting (to pledge allegiance) doesn't preclude an individual from attaining salvation [*falāh*], nor leave them a disciple of Satan. There are thousands amongst our scholarly authorities [*akābir*] who never pledged specific allegiance to anyone, or if they did then it was in the latter years of their lives when they had already attained their ranks of leadership and that too as a pledge of blessings: such as Imām Ibn Ḥajar ‘Asqalānī رحمته pledging allegiance at the blessed hands of our master Madyan رحمته.

I state: if an individual neglects (pledging allegiance) as a result of outright rejection of the notion, know this to be unfounded and deceitful: such an individual is indeed without salvation and a disciple of Satan. If an individual rejects the notion due to finding no one in their era worthy of such a pledge, the ruling will vary based on their intention. If it is due to arrogance, then -

أَلَيْسَ فِي جَهَنَّمَ مَثْوًى لِّلْمُتَكَبِّرِينَ

“Is there not an abode for the arrogant in hell?”

1 Qur’ān: 39/60

Similarly, if an individual considers no one worthy as a result of harbouring unjustified suspicions, this too is a major sin, and those who perform major sins are not assured of salvation. If however there are issues (with the guides of a time) that cause an individual disquiet and they thus avoid pledging allegiance as a precaution, they are free of blame, for, “negative thoughts are a part of firm resolve, so leave that which troubles you for that which doesn't.”

The salvation of excellence [*falāh al-iḥsān*], however, is predicated on a specific guide [*murshid khāṣ*]. This entails a pledge of aspiration [*bay‘at al-irādah*] at the hands of a *shaykh* of deliverance [*shaykh al-iṣāl*], for a *shaykh* of transmission [*shaykh al-ittiṣāl*] nor a pledge of blessings [*bay‘at al-barakah*] suffice this affair.

This path consists of those treacherous straits and pitch black darknesses that cannot be navigated without a true guide leading one through the various assaults of its troughs and peaks that cannot be understood alone or through the study of books. For the minutiae of excellence [*iḥsān*] are not finite and few like those of God-consciousness [*taqwā*] that an individual might extract them himself from written works. The paths to Allāh ﷻ are as varied as the breaths of the creation. Our Master, al-Ghawth al-A‘zam (Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir Jīlānī) رحمته stated in Bahjat (al-Asrār), “Allāh ﷻ does not manifest two attributes in a single being, nor a single attribute in two beings.”

The commentaries of this work state, “the difficulties, treacherous straits and ravines to be found on each of these paths are varied, such that an individual would be unable to face them alone or with the assistance of books. That ancient enemy, the accursed

Satan is present at every moment, and if the aspirant is not also accompanied by one who guides them, opens their eyes, grasps their hand and assists them, who knows which abyss he will lead them to and which chasm will consume them?

Never mind spiritual wayfaring [*sulūk*], it is possible that even their faith [*īmān*] will slip away from them, Allāh forbid. This has been documented many times in history, such as the time when Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir Jīlānī رحمته الله refuted the plot of Satan, who replied, “o ‘Abd al-Qādir, your knowledge has saved you. Aside from you, I have destroyed seventy folks of the spiritual way by means of this ploy” as has been mentioned narrated in Bahjat al-Asrār and other renowned books of the scholars. I state: this does not - Allāh forbid - render the general guide in any way deficient, but rather reflects the deficiency of the wayfarer [*sālik*], for the general guide contains every matter -

مَا فَرَّطْنَا فِي الْكِتَابِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ

“We have missed nothing out of the Record.”

Yet common people are unable to understand even apparent rulings, and thus it is obligatory for laypeople to reference the scholars [*‘ulamā’*], the scholars to reference the leaders [*a’immah*] and the leaders to reference the Messenger ﷺ -

فَاسْأَلُوا أَهْلَ الذِّكْرِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

“So ask the people of remembrance if you know not.”

1 Qur’ān: 6/38

2 Qur’ān: 16/43

This principle is applicable in this situation too, with “the people of remembrance [*ahl al-dhikr*]” referring in this instance to a specific guide [*murshid khāṣ*] who embodies the aforementioned characteristics. An individual who treads this path without a guide, having taken an innovator or ignoramus who does not even qualify as a *shaykh* of transmission [*shaykh al-ittiṣāl*] as a guide, having taken merely a *shaykh* of transmission as a guide and expecting to traverse the path by means of him, or having taken a *shaykh* of deliverance [*shaykh al-iṣāl*] as a guide but preferring one’s own opinions to his instructions shall not reach that salvation (of excellence).

Such an individual will instead have Satan as their guide along this path, and it will be no surprise if Satan distances them not only from even elemental salvation but also the very essence of their faith [*īmān*] - we seek refuge in Allāh, Lord of the worlds! I state: indeed, for this not to occur would be more surprising. Do not assume that this will only happen if the aspirant errs. (The guideless one) will definitely fall astray on this path - and what is the need of abandoning one’s elemental salvation for the sake of that which is not obligatory [*fard*]?

Our accursed enemy is an avowed enemy of faith and lays in wait for every chance and opportunity. He shows the aspirant [*murīd*] miracles which seemingly contradict our doctrine and beliefs, and an individual with limited understanding will struggle to reconcile what they have previously heard with what they see with their own eyes. Many will find it impossible to reject their own senses in favour of clinging to our doctrine, for “that which is heard is not

like that which is seen". Thus, the aspirant is in need of a perfect guide [*murshid kāmīl*] who is able to eradicate these doubts. It is mentioned in the blessed Risālah of Imām Qushayrī ؒ -

“Know that it is rare in such circumstances for an aspirant [*murīd*] at the outset of his spiritual aspiration [*irādah*] to remain untroubled by doctrinal doubts.”

I then state: the prevailing conclusion is that a guide-less individual who treads this path will almost certainly fall prey to the tribulations that surround it and that Satan will consume him as a wolf consumes an unherded sheep. Even if it is possible (to tread this path without a guide), extremely rare is an individual for whom Divine attraction [*jadhb*] alone suffices to save them from the schemes of Satan and the lower self [*nafs*] and fulfil the roles of both the general and specific guides.

(In such a situation) the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ himself will be their specific guide [*murshid khāṣ*], for it is impossible to reach (Allāh ﷻ) without the intermediary of the Prophet ﷺ. Yet such cases are extremely rare, and a ruling is not issued for that which is rare.

I further state: amongst those who tread this path without a guide, fortunate indeed is the one who is able to preserve their salvation of God-consciousness [*falah al-taqwā*] even when countless spiritual exercises and devotions fail to open the way for them or deliver them to a spiritual opening [*fath*].

This is predicated on two conditions: firstly, that such devotions should not bring about delusions of grandeur. Such an individual

should refrain from considering themselves to be exceptional or else they will lose even the salvation of God-consciousness. Secondly, that feelings of deprivation even after lengthy devotions do not lead such an individual to a grievous situation whereby they utter something improper or reject the notion of salvation in its entirety. If an individual falls into this situation, Satan will assume the role of their guide, but if they save themselves by attributing (these obstacles) to their own shortcomings and inadequacies, they are free of blame. Similarly, if the (spiritual) path opens to them, they should not traverse it (without a guide), but remain content with the salvation of God-consciousness.

The allusions of the noble Qur'an contain infinite wisdom, as we observe in the wondrous structure of the verse -

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَابْتَغُوا إِلَيْهِ الْوَسِيلَةَ  
وَجَاهِدُوا فِي سَبِيلِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

“O' you who believe, be conscious of Allāh, and seek a means to Him, and struggle in His way so that you might attain salvation.”<sup>1</sup>

This is an invitation towards the salvation of excellence [*falah al-ihsān*], which is predicated upon God-consciousness, and thus this is the first commandment, “be conscious of Allāh”. When an individual achieves this God-consciousness and wishes to tread the spiritual path, he is instructed to seek a guide, as this affair is normally impossible without one. Thus, “and seek a means to

<sup>1</sup> Qur'an: 5/35

Him," for it is said, "(take) a companion, then (tread) the path [*al-rafiq thumma al-tariq*]. It is only when these needs have been satisfied that we arrive at the primordial commandment, "struggle in His way so that you might attain salvation," in other words: so you might attain the salvation of excellence [*falah al-ihsan*].

May Allāh gather us with those who have attained salvation by means of the generous mercy He bestowed upon them. Verily, He is the Compassionate, the Merciful. And may Allāh send peace, prayers and blessings upon the (Prophet) through whom every righteousness and salvation is attained, and upon his family, companions and great-grandson (Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir Jīlānī) in their entirety, *āmin!*

I thus state: it has become apparent that salvation on this path (of spiritual aspiration) is dependent on an intermediary [*wasilah*], for one was predicated upon the other in the Quranic verse. This proves that (in this regard,) the one without a guide will not obtain salvation, and is therefore in loss. Thus, such an individual is not from the party [*hizb*] of Allāh, but from the party of Satan -

أَلَا إِنَّ حِزْبَ الشَّيْطَانِ هُمُ الْخَاسِرُونَ

"Beware: the party of Satan alone is in loss.."

أَلَا إِنَّ حِزْبَ اللَّهِ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ

"Verily, the party of Allāh are those who have attained salvation."

1 Qur'an: 58/19

2 Qur'an: 58/22

This proves the second statement, "the guide-less one has Satan as his guide" in the context I have already presented. We beseech Allāh for clemency and forgiveness!

#### CONCLUSION

This discussion can thus be summarised in a few points -

1. Every heretic is distanced from salvation and in a state of dire destruction. In every situation, such an individual is guide-less and his guide is Satan, even if he appears to be the follower of someone else or claims to be a guide himself. Whether they tread the path of aspiration [*iradah*] or not, they are a manifestation of "failing to attain salvation" and "having Satan as their guide" in every way.
2. If a Sunni possessed of sound creed who refrains from the path of aspiration commits sinful transgression [*fiqh*], he cannot be said to have attained salvation, but he is not guide-less nor is Satan his guide. If such an individual has pledged allegiance to a *shaykh* who fulfils the various prerequisites, they will be considered his follower, or otherwise a follower of the general guide [*murshid 'ām*].
3. If an individual (such as mentioned in point 2) adopts God-consciousness, he is upon salvation and a follower of either his *shaykh* or the general guide [*murshid 'ām*].

In other words, a Sunni who avoids the affairs of spiritual aspiration and hasn't pledged allegiance to a specific

guide is neither guide-less nor has Satan as his guide. If such an individual commits sinful transgression [*fisq*], they have not attained salvation, whilst if they are God-conscious [*muttaqī*], they will attain salvation.

4. If an individual treads the path of spiritual aspiration without a specific guide [*murshid khāṣ*] but the path neither opened for them nor any spiritual disease such as self-praise or rejection of spiritual realities takes root, such an individual still maintains their original status. They will not have Satan as their guide, and if they are God-conscious, they will attain salvation.

5. If (one of the aforementioned) spiritual diseases takes root, they will no longer remain upon salvation, whilst if they adopt rejection-ism or corrupt doctrines, they will be considered the followers of Satan as well.

6. If the (spiritual) path opens for them, they are in grave danger of destruction until they vow a pledge of aspiration [*bay'at al-irādah*] at the hands of a *shaykh* of deliverance [*shaykh al-īṣāl*]. Satan will be the guide of such a guide-less individual even if they claim allegiance to an unqualified individual or a mere *shaykh* of transgression, or even if they claim to be a guide themselves.

7. If however Divine attraction [*jadhb*] suffices such an individual, they are free from all harm, and the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ will be considered their guide.

All praise is for Allāh ﷻ. You will not find such elegant research or magnificent detail anywhere besides these pages. It is over twenty years since this query was first received, and this short answer was penned which continues to illuminate the heart of this servant. And all praise is for Allāh ﷻ, Lord of the worlds. May the most virtuous of prayers and the most perfect of peace be upon the Master of the Prophets and his kinsfolk and companions, and Allāh ﷻ knows best.

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
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"The Imām draws upon the texts of the Qur'an, Prophetic traditions and writings of the sages and spiritual guides to place these institutions in their correct contexts by means of a considered and forensic approach...The translation of this book into English for the first time is therefore of vital importance to Muslims in the West considering pledging allegiance to a spiritual guide."

— SHAYKH ISMAEEL DE SILVA